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SUBJECT: Kajaki Dam Turns on the Lights in Afghanistan's South

REF: A. KABUL 3186

[1B](#). KABUL 2688

[1C](#). KABUL 2670

[¶11.](#) (SBU) Summary: Despite security issues that continue to affect the Kajaki dam project, USAID recently completed refurbishing a second hydroelectric turbine at the dam in Helmand province. This turbine, together with another rebuilt by USAID in September 2005, has boosted the power generation capacity of the Kajaki hydropower plant to approximately 33 megawatts (MW), of which 12 MW are now being transmitted to Kandahar City and 18 MW to communities in Lashkar Gah, Musa Qala, and Sangin. Providing power to Helmand and Kandahar helps create jobs and deter insurgency elements. Attempting to co-opt these positive developments, Taliban groups have tried to claim the dam renovation was due to their threats. A concerted Afghan-led public affairs strategy is effectively addressing this misinformation campaign. End summary.

Kajaki Dam History

[¶12.](#) (U) In 1953, the U.S. government funded Kajaki dam to provide irrigation in the Helmand River Valley. During the mid-1970s, USAID installed two 16.5 MW turbine generators in the hydropower plant located at the foot of the dam. These units deteriorated during twenty-five years of neglect resulting from the Soviet invasion and subsequent Taliban regime.

Progress

[¶13.](#) (U) With the recent refurbishment of the second turbine, the Kajaki dam now produces 33 MW of electricity. Of this 33 MW, 12 MW go to Kandahar city, three times the power the city received from Kajaki in 2008, according to local electric utility staff. The city now enjoys daily 24-hour power in contrast with widespread power rationing prevalent through June of this year. (However, insufficient line capacity continues to restrain full transmission to the city and not all consumers receive equal benefits.) In addition, nearby communities receive 18 MW of power: Lashkar Gah 7.5 MW, Sangin 4 MW, and Tangi-Kajaki-Musa Qala 6.5 MW.

[¶14.](#) (U) Afghans first cite employment and access to electricity when asked to identify the "biggest problem in your local area" (according to ISAF and Asia Foundation surveys), and increased power from Kajaki addresses both. The refurbishment project directly employed Afghan powerhouse workers, Afghan machinists, and Afghan subcontractors, while greater access to more reliable and cheaper power will stimulate economic development and spur further job creation.

Combating Taliban Misinformation

[¶15.](#) (SBU) Attempting to co-opt these positive developments, Taliban groups have tried to claim the dam renovation was accelerated due to their threats. A concerted Afghan-led public affairs strategy is effectively addressing this misinformation campaign. Helmand

Governor Galabuddin Mangal has asked to visit the dam with Helmand media in the upcoming weeks, and the PRT is supporting Governor Mangal's request. The Embassy is also exploring the possibility of a joint event at Kajaki with President Karzai and Ambassador Eikenberry. While we will publicize progress at Kajaki Dam, we will be careful not to overstate the improvements, since significant work is still needed at the site and security remains an issue. To highlight overall gains in the energy sector, the Embassy is launching an awareness campaign including interviews, press releases and television spots to highlight gains in the energy sector.

Future Steps

¶6. (SBU) Realization of Kajaki's full potential to generate 51.5 MW of power will require the installation of the third turbine and an upgrade of transmission lines. The security situation around Kajaki makes the future of that phase of the project uncertain. USAID support will also help commercialize and improve Kandahar City's electrical utility. Long-term success for the municipal utility (and Afghanistan's entire energy sector) depends on security and ability to collect fees to pay for operation, maintenance, and infrastructure investment.

¶7. (SBU) Over the next 18 months, USAID will work with national utility DABS to improve the efficiency of the Kandahar City power grid. A first step will be an assessment of physical infrastructure needs in the city. In addition, USAID has released tenders for two new electricity sub-stations for the Kajaki system and will build or refurbish additional sub-stations and new transmission lines, depending on the security situation.

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Comment

¶8. (SBU) It is noteworthy that the Taliban, who have little value to provide Afghan citizens, feel sufficiently threatened by projects such as the Kajaki dam renovation that they are trying to take credit for it in the eyes of the local populace. We are stepping up our public diplomacy game to ensure the project is recognized as part of a long-term USG commitment and strengthens the credibility of the Afghan government in the eyes of its citizens. End comment.

Eikenberry